**U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service**

# Accomplishment Report

The **Alpena Fishery Resources Office (FRO)** is located in Alpena, Michigan and works to meet U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Fishery and Ecosystem goals within Lake Huron, Western Lake Erie, and connecting waters of the St. Marys River, St. Clair River, and Detroit River. Activities include Aquatic Species Conservation and Management, Aquatic Habitat Conservation and Management, Cooperation with Native Americans, Leadership in Science and Technology, Partnerships and Accountability, Public Use, and Workforce Management – all of which are conducted in alignment with the Service Fisheries Program Vision for the Future. The station is one of many field offices located within Region 3, the Great Lakes Big Rivers Region.

# Aquatic Species Conservation and Management

## Service and State Present State of Lake Huron Lake Trout

***Submitted by Aaron Woldt***
***Fishery Biologist***


Fishery Biologist Aaron Woldt of the Alpena FRO attended the Great Lakes Fishery Commission Combined Lake Committee Meeting from March 20-23 in Windsor, Ontario. Woldt, along with Ji He of MDNR, presented the state of Lake Huron lake trout in 2004 as a two part presentation. Dr. He's presentation described current lake trout population dynamics using statistical-catch-at-age modeling and showed recent increases in biomass and spawning stock biomass in the main basin of Lake Huron due to improved sea lamprey control, continued stocking, and reduced fishery induced mortality since 2000. Woldt's presentation summarized fall, spawning survey data from nine sites around the lake relative to stated milestones in the Lake Huron Lake Trout Rehabilitation Guide and showed documented progress toward those milestones since the last State of Lake Huron in 1999.

Woldt and He stressed that much evidence indicates that Lake Huron may have turned a corner in its progress toward lake trout rehabilitation. Improved sea lamprey control due to treatment of the St. Mary's River, strong harvest control, and continued stocking have led to increases in spawning stock biomass and expansion of the population age structure in all main basin units in US waters. Since 1999, there is growing evidence of natural reproduction in agency sampling efforts, and Woldt stressed that agencies need to turn their attention toward investigating impediments to successful wild reproduction (e.g. exotic predation, EMS, contaminants, lack of

forage, habitat degradation, spawning habitat selection) of Lake Huron lake trout stocks for rehabilitation efforts to progress.

The Service, State of Michigan, and other partner resource agencies around the lake have participated in lake trout rehabilitation efforts in Lake Huron since the 1970's. Rehabilitating Lake Huron lake trout stocks is consistent with the Service's goal of building and maintaining self-sustaining populations of native fish species under the "Aquatic Species Conservation and Management" priority of the Fisheries Program Vision for the Future.

# Alpena FRO Participates in Monthly Radio Program with Congresswoman Miller

***Submitted by Jerry McClain***
***Fishery Biologist***

On March 29 Project Leader McClain participated in The Washington Connection, a monthly radio program hosted by Congresswoman Candice Miller (MI-10). McClain had been asked to participate in the show when he visited with Ms. Miller on March 9 during March Madness. The monthly radio program airs on local stations in Michigan Congressional Districts and updates citizens on Ms. Miller's Washington activities, as well as issues of interest to those communities in her district.

During the interview with the Congresswoman, McClain discussed lake sturgeon restoration efforts being directed by the Alpena FRO, reasons for the decline of the species and impediments to recovery. McClain discussed the sturgeon spawning site that has been discovered near the Blue Water Bridge in Port Huron and the importance of that site to remnant stocks in this region of the Great Lakes. McClain also provided an overview of the Service and the responsibilities of the Alpena FRO in Lake Huron and the St. Clair corridor. The interview was taped on March 29 and aired on April 1.

Interaction with Michigan congressional offices helps increase visibility of Service programs, enhances relationships with district and Washington staff persons and establishes points of contact for natural resources issues for which the Alpena FRO has federal responsibility. This effort is consistent with and supportive of the "Aquatic Species Conservation and Management", "Aquatic Habitat Conservation and Management", and "Public Use" priorities of the Service's Fisheries Program Vision for the Future.

# Alpena FRO Prepares for 2006 Aquatic Nuisance Species Sampling Season

***Submitted by Anjanette Bowen***
***Fishery Biologist***

During the month of March, Fishery Biologist Bowen made preparations for the upcoming 2006 Aquatic Nuisance Species (ANS) sampling season. Sampling gear was inspected and inventoried, and repairs were made to damaged nets.

Small mesh gillnets (1.5 inch mesh, 6 ft x 100 ft) are used to control the Eurasian ruffe (ruffe), an invasive European percid, population in the Thunder Bay River, Lake Huron during spring spawning. Efforts to control the ruffe will begin in early April. Gillnets were repaired by Biologists Kowalski and Koproski. All necessary equipment was assembled for the upcoming effort.

Small mesh bottom trawls (1.5 inch mesh, 16 ft trawls) are used to survey for new populations of ANS in U.S. waters of Lake Huron and the St. Marys River during the fall. Bottom trawls sample round goby (goby), ruffe, and other invasive species including white perch, threespine stickleback and others. The bottom dwelling native fish community is sampled as well. Bowen mended trawls damaged during the 2005 sampling season and made preparations to purchase replacement gear for those that could not be repaired. Efforts to monitor for new ANS populations in U.S. waters of the St. Marys River and Lake Huron will begin in September.

Activities to combat ANS in the Great Lakes benefits native fish species and supports the Service's Fishery Program Vision for the Future priority for "Aquatic Species Conservation and Management".

# Aquatic Habitat Conservation and Management

## National Fish Habitat Initiative Discussed at Tri-State Partners Meeting

***Submitted by Jerry McClain***
***Fishery Biologist***

Project Leader McClain attended the Tri-State Partners for Fish and Wildlife (Partners) Program meeting held in Angola, Indiana March 28-30. As part of the meeting agenda McClain provided the group an overview and update on the National Fish Habitat Initiative (NFHI). The presentation provided information on this new program to state and local Partners coordinators from Michigan, Ohio and Indiana and stimulated discussion on how the Service's numerous habitat restoration programs can be better coordinated to enhance the overall effort.
This effort will assist in improving coordination and collaboration between Service programs for habitat restoration and is consistent with and supportive of the "Aquatic Habitat Conservation and Management" and "Partnerships and Accountability" priorities of the Service's Fisheries Program Vision for the Future.

# Partners for Fish and Wildlife Tri-State Meeting

***Submitted by Heather Rawlings***
***Fish and Wildlife Biologist***


Project Leader McClain and Biologist Rawlings traveled to Angola, IN March 28-30, 2006 for the first annual Tri-State Partners for Fish and Wildlife meeting. This meeting allowed biologists and supervisors from three states- Michigan, Indiana and Ohio to share ideas and compare strategies to make our programs more consistent regionally, with one another and possibly find new and better ways to achieve habitat restoration goals on private lands. Mr. Jeffrey Kiefer, State Coordinator of the Indiana Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program was the host of the meeting, which was held at the Potawatomi Inn in Pokagon State Park. Biologist Rawlings was the moderator and presenter for a discussion concerning watershed restoration. Topics for the session included fish passage, stream bank restoration, large woody debris placement, and the science of stream restoration.

Approximately 60 natural resources professionals attended the meeting, including Service personnel from both the Regional and Washington Offices. This meeting and completion of aquatic habitat restoration projects contribute toward the "Aquatic Habitat Conservation and Management" and "Partnerships and Accountability" priorities of the Service's Fisheries Program Vision for the Future.

# Thunder Bay Project Implementation Working Committee Meeting

***Submitted by Aaron Woldt***
***Fishery Biologist***

Fishery Biologist Aaron Woldt participated in a Working Committee meeting for the Thunder Bay Power Company Thunder Bay River Project Implementation. The Working Committee was created to assist Thunder Bay Power (TBP) and its parent company North American Hydro (NAH) in meeting the requirements of its Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) license. Biologist Woldt is the Service representative on the Working Committee.

The primary focus of the March 29, 2006 meeting was to discuss the filing of a final report that evaluated downstream fish passage/diversion strategies for NAH projects on the Thunder Bay River. Based on comments from the Service and MDNR, this report made use of existing fish community data in a "desktop" model evaluation to identify fish passage/diversion strategies that would be appropriate and cost effective for the NAH projects on the Thunder Bay River. The report was filed with FERC on February 22, 2006 by NAH. In addition, NAH also presented the results of its 2005 purple loosestrife and Eurasian water milfoil monitoring. The Working Committee also agreed to tentatively endorse a developer's proposal to relocate a proposed

fishing pier at the Hubbard Lake Dam to the opposite side of the river with the developer absorbing all construction costs for the pier, foot path, and parking lot to be constructed in 2006. The Working Committee asked to see detailed plans of the proposed structure before granting final approval.

The meeting was attended by member representatives from Michigan DNR, NAH, and the Service. In addition representatives from the Hubbard Lake Sportsmen and Improvement Association, Montmorency Conservation District, Thunder Bay Audubon Society, and Northeast Michigan Council of Governments also participated.

Service involvement in the TBP Working Committee provides opportunities to minimize or mitigate the impacts of habitat alteration on fish and other aquatic species caused by hydropower facilities in the Thunder Bay River system. This outcome is consistent with the "Aquatic Habitat Conservation and Management" priority of the Fisheries Program Vision for the Future.

# Partnerships and Accountability

## ANS Tissue Samples Transferred to the University of Toledo for Genetics Studies

***Submitted by Anjanette Bowen***
***Fishery Biologist***

Alpena FRO Fishery Biologist Bowen provided the University of Toledo - Lake Erie Center with Aquatic Nuisance Species (ANS) tissue samples from Eurasian ruffe (ruffe) and zebra mussels in March.

Ruffe were collected from 1998 to 2002 from the Thunder Bay River, Lake Huron during spring efforts to remove spawning adults and fall efforts to assess the young-of-the-year ruffe population. Ruffe were frozen following collection. Tissue samples were harvested in 2005 and placed in ethanol. Samples consisted of pectoral fin tissue. Zebra mussels were collected in the fall of 2005 from the Thunder Bay River and were preserved whole in ethanol for genetics studies. The ANS samples will be used to gather information on the genetic origin of invasives within the Great Lakes.

Tissue samples were also collected from the native yellow perch spawning population in Thunder Bay in the spring of 2005. These samples will be used to examine wild spawning populations of native species from areas around the Great Lakes.

Samples were sent via Fed Ex to the University on March 22. In 2006, round gobies and zebra mussels will be collected from a number of ports and rivers in U.S. waters of Lake Huron and the St. Marys River during regular fall ANS surveillance, and provided to the university for analysis.

This effort supports and is consistent with the Service's Fishery Program Vision for the Future priorities for "Partnerships and Accountability" and "Aquatic Species Conservation and Management".

# Alpena FRO Helps University of Wisconsin Graduate Student

*Submitted by Adam Kowalski*
*Fish and Wildlife Biologist*

During the month of March, Fishery Biologist Adam Kowalski was contacted by Heidi Keuler a graduate student at University of Wisconsin La Crosse working at the La Crosse FRO to assist in aging lake sturgeon fin rays for her graduate project. Keuler has been comparing age and growth between lake sturgeon in Legend Lake and Lake Winnebago. Keuler supplied images of cross sectioned fin rays to Kowalski for aging. These ages would be compared with others providing similar analysis for accuracy. Kowalski examined approximately 130 samples from Lake Winnebago and 150 samples from Legend Lake. Summary of this comparative analysis will be available through Kueler upon completion of the project.

This work is consistent with Service's Fisheries Program Vision for the Future "Partnerships and Accountability" priority and enhances open, interactive communication between the Fisheries Program and its Partners.

# Alpena FRO and Michigan DNR Coordinate Prey Fish Collections for Lake Huron Study of Predator Response to Prey Abundance

*Submitted by Anjanette Bowen*
*Fishery Biologist*

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Alpena FRO is assisting the Michigan DNR with a study funded by the Great Lakes Fishery Commission to examine the responses of lake trout and chinook salmon to unprecedented declines in major prey fish abundance in Lake Huron. Alpena FRO is collecting prey samples for the study in the fall during scheduled ANS surveillance activities at ports and rivers in US waters of Lake Huron. On March 28, Alpena FRO Biologist Bowen met with Michigan DNR Biologist Ji He of the Alpena Great Lakes Fishery Station to transfer prey samples collected in 2005 and coordinate 2006 sample collection.

In 2005, samples of round goby were collected from Port Dolomite, Cheboygan River, and Thunder Bay in September. These samples were transferred to the DNR for processing and analysis. In 2006, up to 50 samples of all species captured will be needed from each Lake Huron location sampled. Whole fish will be separated by species and frozen.

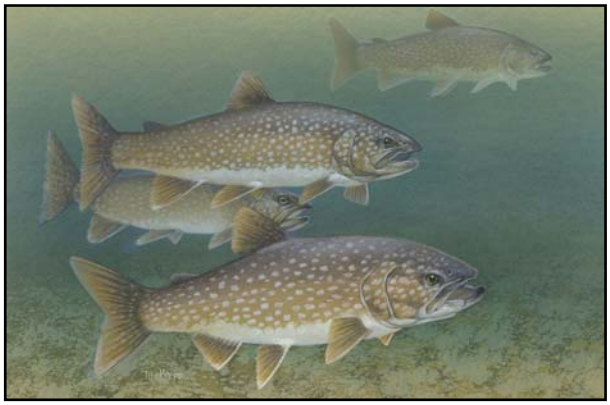
The principal investigators and coordinators for this study are James Bence of Michigan State University and Ji He and James Johnson of the Michigan DNR Alpena Great Lakes Fishery Station. Partners include the USGS Great Lakes Sciences Center, Ontario Ministry of Natural

Resources, Chippewa/Ottawa Resource Authority, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The study was initiated in October 2005 and will continue into the fall of 2008.

This effort is consistent with the Service's Fishery Program Vision for the Future priorities for "Partnerships and Accountability" and "Aquatic Species Conservation and Management".

# Cooperation with Native Americans

## Service Biologist Chairs Modeling Subcommittee Meeting for 1836 Treaty Waters



*Submitted by Aaron Woldt*
*Fishery Biologist*

Fishery Biologist Aaron Woldt of the Alpena FRO attended and chaired the March 14-16 meeting of the Modeling Subcommittee (MSC) of the Technical Fisheries Committee (TFC). The primary focus of this meeting was to generate preliminary 2006 harvest limits for lake trout in 1836 Treaty waters of lakes Huron, Superior, and Michigan, although other technical matters were discussed. As stipulated in the 2000 Consent Decree, preliminary lake trout harvest numbers must be calculated by the MSC, reviewed by the TFC, and presented to the parties to the decree by March 31 each year. The MSC will complete final lake trout harvest numbers and present them to the TFC for review at the May 3 TFC meeting.

Biologist Woldt and Ji He of the Michigan DNR presented an update of the status of northern Lake Huron (MH-1 and MH-2) lake trout stock assessment models, model diagnostic output, and preliminary 2006 lake trout harvest limits. In MH-1, the 2006 preliminary lake trout harvest limit increased from 2005 levels due to continued lower than target total mortality rates and increases in stock and fishable biomass. In MH-2, preliminary harvest limits dropped from 2005 levels due to a change in the way survey selectivity was modeled in 2006. This change results in a better model fit to the observed index of abundance from the graded mesh lake trout survey and more accurate model estimates of abundance. The 2006 preliminary harvest limit for MH-2 is still well above recent harvest levels for this unit. These preliminary limits were presented to the TFC for review on March 31.

In addition to performing model analyses, biologist Woldt helped run the MSC meeting ensuring all agenda items were discussed and kept meeting minutes. A preliminary draft of the March 14-16 MSC meeting minutes was emailed to MSC members for review.

Harvest limits produced at this meeting, when reviewed by the parties and finalized, will become binding 2006 lake trout harvest limits for 1836 Treaty waters. These harvest limits will allow lake trout fisheries to be executed while still protecting the biological integrity of the lake trout stocks. This outcome is consistent with the Service's goal of building and maintaining self-sustaining populations of native fish species while meeting the needs of tribal communities under

the "Aquatic Species Conservation and Management" and "Cooperation with Native Americans" priorities of the Fisheries Program Vision for the Future.

## Gill Net Maintenance

***Submitted by Scott Koproski***
***Fishery Biologist***

During the month of March, Fishery Biologists Scott Koproski and Adam Kowalski completed repair of assessment gill nets used during the 2005 fishery independent lake whitefish survey in 1836 Treaty waters. Two different styles of gill nets were fished by Alpena FRO during this survey: traditional bottom style gill nets and experimental gill nets that fish higher in the water column. The difference between the two styles of nets is that the traditional gill nets have the weights secured to the bottom part of the net frame and the experimental gill nets have the weights secured to a three foot dropper line which is secured to the bottom part of the net frame. This dropper line results in a "mesh free" area located at the bottom 3 feet of the water column. The experimental nets help reduce lake trout by-catch during the survey since lake trout typically orient themselves on the lake bottom. Koproski and Kowalski repaired in excess of 14,600 feet of gill net this past winter.

Both standard and experimental gill nets were fish simultaneously during the 2005 fishery independent lake whitefish survey. Preliminary results indicate that lake whitefish catch rates (CPE) increased slightly using the experimental assessment nets and lake trout CPE dropped significantly. Both types of assessment nets will be fished during the 2006 survey and results will again be analyzed.

This work is an example of Alpena FRO's commitment to the following Fisheries Vision Priorities: "Partnerships and Accountability", "Aquatic Species Conservation and Management", and "Cooperation with Native Americans".

# Public Use

## Lake Huron ANS Sighting Information Provided to Update Distribution Maps

***Submitted by Anjanette Bowen***
***Fishery Biologist***

Alpena FRO Fishery Biologist Bowen provided information on Aquatic Nuisance Species (ANS) sightings in Lake Huron to the USGS Non-indigenous Aquatic Species (NAS) Coordinator, Amy Benson, on March 14. The USGS Florida Integrated Sciences Center in Gainesville, Florida

prepares and updates maps of confirmed ANS sightings in the Great Lakes and the U.S. as a whole.

The new information provided included round goby sighting data collected by Alpena FRO during fall ANS surveillance efforts in U.S. waters of Lake Huron and the St. Marys River, and data collected by Lloyd Mohr of the OMNR - Lake Huron Management Unit in Owen Sound, Ontario. The sighting data will provide a more comprehensive map of the distribution of round goby in U.S. and Canadian waters of Lake Huron.

This effort supports the Service's Fishery Program Vision for the Future priorities for "Aquatic Species Conservation and Management", "Partnerships and Accountability", and "Public Use".

# Workforce Management

## CPR and First Aid Training

***Submitted by Anjanette Bowen***
***Fishery Biologist***


Staff at the Alpena FRO were certified in American Red Cross CPR and First Aid on March 9. This annual refresher training was provided by Bob Petersen of the Jordan River National Fish Hatchery, located in Elmira, MI.

This training is of particular importance to Alpena FRO staff that regularly function as main care givers for first aid emergencies in isolated offshore areas of Lake Huron during fishery field sampling surveys.

Many thanks and much appreciation to Mr. Petersen for certifying our staff in CPR and First Aid through the years and to Jordan River National Fish Hatchery Manager Rick Westerhof for supporting our safety training needs.

CPR and First Aid training meet Regional Safety requirements and the Service's Fishery Program Vision for the Future priority for "Workforce Management".

**Alpena FRO Accomplishment Report**
**March 2006**

**U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Alpena FRO**
**145 Water Street, Alpena, MI 49707**

**Phone: 989/356-5102**

For more information on Alpena FRO programs and activities or to view other station reports visit our website located at http://www.fws.gov/midwest/alpena/.